

Is Fitra a Replacement for Rational Inquiry? Kalām, Logic, and the Belief in God - Maydan

59–74 minutes

Introduction

In a recent article titled “[Atheism and Radical Skepticism: Ibn Taymiyyah’s Epistemic Critique](#),” Dr. Nazir Khan argues that rational inquiry is unnecessary for justifying our belief in God; that, in fact, syllogistic reasoning is inherently incapable of doing so. Instead, following Ibn Taymiyya, Khan suggests that the belief in God is *fiṭrī* in the sense that it is known to all human beings non-inferentially, barring abnormal circumstances. Likewise, he claims that the denial of God’s existence is tantamount to a form of radical skepticism, and therefore, it warrants no rational response. Belief in God (which god, how many of them, and with what attributes, Khan never ventures to tell us) is part of human nature: it is of the same type as belief in an external world, “good and evil, causality, numbers, truth, and so on.”^[1] Elsewhere he tells us that it “does not make sense to be skeptical about the existence of good and evil (morality), cause and effect (causality), truth and falsehood, logic, nor does it make sense to be skeptical about the Divine.”^[2] Together, these concepts are combined to make our lives meaningful. Without them, life is meaningless.

Since belief in God is a basic belief contained within the *fiṭra*, it makes no sense to try to justify it with proof; doing so is akin to trying to prove that there is an external world, or that causality is a necessary element of reality, and so on. Not only is skepticism not worth a response, but further, if one does engage with the skeptic, then they are automatically engaged in a form of sophistry (*safsaṭa*) themselves. Thus, the vast majority of the Islamic philosophical and theological traditions were engaged in sophistry. Likewise, people who are skeptical of some of these innate ideas and not others, according to Khan, are being inconsistent and contradicting their own nature. Not only is rational inquiry not necessary to demonstrate or justify the belief in God, the instruments adopted by the Islamic tradition turn out to be incapable of proving the existence of God. Logic itself, we are told, does not have the power to demonstrate the existence of any particular thing. Take a look at the following statement from Khan:

[The problem with considering the existence of God to be a

theoretical proposition in need of justification, demonstration, and substantiation is that it commits a fundamental epistemological fallacy. It uses that which is less evident to prove that which is more evident. It places the epistemic weight of God lower than the epistemic weight of those features of creation being cited as proof. But as a matter of fact, the Divine is the most assured of certainties, and His existence forms the ontological basis upon which all other existence is rendered intelligible and meaningful. Knowledge of God is thus the basis of having an intelligible epistemology; it serves as the basis for all other knowledge (*wa-al-‘ilm bihi aṣl li-kulli ‘ilm*).^[3]

Notice that Nazir moves from God being the ontological basis to being the epistemological basis. He fundamentally confuses ontological priority with epistemic priority; that is, while it is true that God is the creator and cause of all things (at least, according to Sunni theology, but it is not so clearly the case in Taymiyyan theology), it does not mean that God is the most basic or fundamental premise upon which we base our *knowledge*. Consider his statement: to consider the existence of God as a theoretical proposition is to commit an epistemological fallacy. That fallacy, Khan tells us, is “to use that which is less evident to prove that which is more evident.”^[4] Even if one grants that this is an example of arguing from the less evident to the more evident – which I do not – it is not clear how this amounts to a *fallacy* as opposed to merely being inefficient. Furthermore, there may be additional aspects that are clarified through a regimented argument which were not clear from our intuitions about a topic. For example, most people may intuit that, if God created the world, He must have power. But what is the extent of that Power? Does it extend to logically impossible objects? Only through more detailed arguments can one go beyond their surface level intuitions. Now, the only way it could be considered a fallacy, however, is if one can show that the premises involved in the cosmological arguments for God’s existence somehow presuppose the conclusion. But this is evidently not the case. Take a look at the standard cosmological argument for God’s existence:

1. The world is contingent.
2. Every contingent thing has a cause.
3. The world has a cause.

Neither of the two premises here presuppose the existence of God. The minor premise basically means to say that ‘the world could have been otherwise.’ That much should be obvious. The second premise, too, should be evident. No argument is needed to show that it is true, but one may still clarify the concepts involved in case the meaning of the proposition is not clear; when it becomes clear, it should be evident to anyone that the argument is sound. Is the

existence of God really more evident than these two premises? Do we perceive God with our senses? Do we even have a notion of God that we can separate from the ideas we have been subject to since we were children? The only way one can conceive of the proposition being “more evident” to one is from a purely subjective standpoint: one who is raised in a religious way since childhood, and taught to look at the world in a certain way, without ever having to think about the features of the world and whether or not it indicates the existence of a Creator. But the fact that this is subjectively true for people with that kind of acculturation does not mean that the conclusion is *epistemically* and *objectively* more evident than the premises.

Indeed, the premises here are only less evident to one who has blindly accepted the conclusion without ever reflecting on it. It is quite easy to shake beliefs taken on imitation if one asks a few pointed questions, and this should be obvious to anyone aware of what is going on today. But do not worry, Khan urges, for “the Divine is the most assured of certainties.”^[5] It is so assured, it appears, that you cannot even demonstrate that it is true. An honest look at Khan’s article, from beginning to end, only reveals opium. Nowadays, with the proliferation of the modern sciences, modern education, and their methods throughout the world, alongside the propaganda that metaphysics has no hope of being a science and the general abandonment of *kalām* and philosophy, the effects of these shaky beliefs should be obvious to most. I am sure this is not lost on the people who decided to start an institute called “Yaqeen,” set up with the express purpose to address this problem.

Khan’s case could have been slightly improved if he could have explained just how the *fiṭra* is different from intuition, or a feeling, and how exactly it is supposed to do its job. Take a look at the following:

Yet, irrespective of how a believer arrives at faith, it is the *fiṭrah* that provides epistemic justification for that faith. Once a believer has attained certitude in God, the degree to which this belief accords with their *fiṭrah* provides all the epistemic justification needed in order to know that anything contrary to that faith is baseless even without possessing the means to rationally demonstrate or articulate it; the believer does not need to know the specifics of philosophical terminology to know that Islam is the truth.^[6]

The rather loose language here suggests that *fiṭra* is not the way one arrives at beliefs, but rather, something else that one uses to epistemically justify the beliefs they have acquired through other means. Notice what he says: “Once a believer has attained certitude in God, the degree to which this belief accords with their *fiṭrah* provides *all the epistemic justification needed*.”^[7] A number of questions arise here: how does one reach that certainty? Should

we just imitate our parents? If someone arrives at their beliefs through reasoned argument and justifies their beliefs epistemically, what is left for the *fiṭra* to do? What about individuals who have imitated the wrong people? Are they excused? How exactly does the *fiṭra* even provide “all the epistemic justification needed”? Does it provide us with knowledge of God?

By trying to solve one problem with an appeal to *fiṭra*, Khan ends up in a web of others. He neither explains how atheism is a form of radical skepticism nor does he explain how the *fiṭra* justifies any belief at all. Indeed, Khan wavers between saying that the *fiṭra* comes with certain innate beliefs and saying that it is there to justify those beliefs which are acquired by other means. Apparently, you just acquire your certainty, then you will simply know, non-inferentially, whether your beliefs are true or not. He does not appear to realize that his explanation above leaves room for arriving at beliefs through rational inquiry. Unless the *fiṭra* is some kind of rudimentary form of thinking or intuition, then this explanation verges on magical thinking. But if it is a form of rudimentary thought, then it has the potential to be expressed and elaborated in clearer forms of thinking, that is, rational proof: certainly, a worthwhile investment if you consider that your eternal fate depends on whether you come to the correct belief. Of course, for Ibn Taymiyya, this is not strictly speaking true, since he believes in a form of universal salvation, in violation of the consensus of all sects of Islam, and in direct contradiction with the numerous explicit verses indicating the eternity of Hell. So much for the so-called ‘scriptural’ approaches to theology. Recall Qur’an 3:7: “As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they will follow that which is unclear, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation (that conforms to their desires).”

In summary, Khan’s most important claims include the following: (i) atheism is a form of radical skepticism; (ii) belief in God is justified by the *fiṭra*; (iii) rational approaches to belief in God are unwarranted and futile; (iv) the Qur’an does not support rational approaches to belief in God. In what follows, I will argue that there is no evidence that atheism is a form of radical skepticism; that there is no rational or scriptural evidence to support Ibn Taymiyya’s interpretation of the *fiṭra*; that the Qur’an is committed to rational inquiry; and that classical logic is a powerful and effective tool in rational inquiry. I will end with some reflections on Ghazali’s views on some of these issues, who is sorely mischaracterized by Khan in his article.

The Science of Kalām and the Qur’anic Commitment to Reason

Unfortunately for Khan, atheism, while false, is not a form of radical skepticism. The belief in God is an inferential proposition and

simply does not fall into the same category as belief in an external world or a belief in other minds; this is self-evident. On the contrary, the belief in God presupposes the existence of the external world. Now, I think it is true that the denial of the existence of the God entails the denial of a self-evident premise (e.g., the causal principle or the contingency of the world); however, this very entailment is not obvious and therefore an argument is required to show that atheism does in fact entail a denial of a self-evident proposition. In doing so, we would have grounds to claim that atheism entails a form of sophistry; although it is clear that this usage of sophistry is not quite the same as skepticism, and to insist otherwise does not advance the discussion or resolve any real issues. Instead of taking this route, Khan takes us through an overwrought and amateurish history of ancient Greek skepticism in an attempt to explain to us that: (i) radical skepticism warrants no response; (ii) atheism is a form of radical skepticism; and (iii) therefore, the existence of God warrants no argument. Nevertheless, he does not make the crucial move of explaining *how* atheism is another form of radical skepticism, nor does he provide a convincing account for the idea that belief in God is *in fact* a non-inferential, *fiṭrī* belief; he merely states it like it is a fact that we should all accept, and if we do not, then we are all guilty of sophistry.

At the very least, Khan should admit that, even if one holds (as I do) that the belief in a Creator and a Transcendent Cause *is* intuitive (note: Ibn Taymiyya does not accept the existence of a *Transcendent* Cause), this intuition is not enough to (i) fulfill the obligation to know God as normatively required by Islamic law; nor (ii) set the foundations for the Islamic sciences and, therefore, Islamic life; nor (iii) to engage other rational human beings and establish any proof against them, which is one of the primary functions of Prophethood. Indeed, God states in the Qur'an that He has sent Prophets so that humanity will not have any proof against Him on the Last Day (see Qur'an 4:165; 20:134; 17:15); the implication of these verses is that if God had not sent Prophets to humanity, they would have had sufficient grounds to be absolved of moral culpability.

This may be why there is only one verse that mentions the word *fiṭra* in the Qur'an, while references to *burhān* (proof), *sulṭān* ('authority,' as in *proof*), '*aql* (intellect), '*ilm* (knowledge), *ḥujja* (proof, argument), *naẓar* (reflection, inquiry) and their cognates are ubiquitous. God commands us to reflect; God states that His signs are for those with intellect; God lauds those with proof; God censures those without proof; God criticizes human beings for not using their intellect, but nowhere do we find a condemnation for denying "*fiṭra*." Above all, God distinguishes between those with *knowledge* of God and those without ('Are they equal, those who

know and those who do not?' Q:39:9). "And among man and beast they are likewise of diverse colours; verily, it is only those with knowledge who have fear of God" (Qur'an 35:28). This diversity of colour, among other things, points to the fact that the world could have been otherwise; and the fact that it is one way, and not another, demonstrates that it needs a cause to determine which of the myriad possibilities comes into existence. After reflecting on these signs deeply, which is what the Qur'an demands, one comes to have *knowledge* of God and the truth of Prophethood. Now, if this knowledge of God was something possessed by all human beings by virtue of their innate *fiṭra*, then the second part of this verse would have no meaning. If, however, knowledge of all these things was *latent* and reflection was required "re-discover" it, then it is not quite clear what this *fiṭra* is doing apart from perhaps accounting for a certain sense of tranquility.

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It cannot be stressed enough just how ubiquitous argumentation and the appeal to reason is in the Qur'an. For one to deny this, or to claim that one who engages in argumentation is engaging in *safsaṭa*, verges on the absurd if not the heretical. It may be possible for Khan to attempt, albeit without much success, that some verses are merely rhetorical questions – he cannot say the same for all of them, and there are many. Take note of what God commands His Prophet (and all of us by extension): "Call to the path of your Lord with wisdom (*ḥikma*), good counsel, and argue (*jādil*) with them in the best way" (Qur'an 16:125). Commentators such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī point out that this verse indicates two distinct forms of inviting others to Islam: wisdom and good counsel. Wisdom refers to presenting a positive case by demonstrating what is true by means of proof; good counsel refers to arguments and appeals that are effective even if they are not meant to be proofs. Then there is *jadal*, which involves argumentation whose express purpose is to incite their opponents to reflect by showing their own beliefs to be incoherent. All of these modes can be found explicitly in the Qur'an.

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For example, the debates between Prophet Ibrahim (S) and his people are long and elaborate, and they involve reflection upon the heavens (which most people of the ancient world held to be eternal and associated with gods). By showing that these celestial bodies are in fact subject to change, he demonstrates that they cannot in fact be gods, because they are created and dependent like everything else. Thus, the Prophet Ibrahim, through presenting these inferences to his people, shows them how to arrive at the existence of the true God; God attributes the argument to Himself

(*tilka ḥujjatuna*). Elsewhere, the Prophet Ibrahim presents dialectical modes of argument, such as when he tells the King Nimrud to ‘bring the sun forth from the West.’ Taking these verses as their normative basis, Muslims established the science of *kalām*, which is defined as the science which reflects on every knowable (*al-ma‘lūm*) insofar as it leads to the establishment of revealed doctrine, by means of demonstrating those theses and responding to possible alternatives and objections. Thus, when al-Hasan al-Yūsī broached the question of whether Abu l-Hasan al-Ash‘arī was the founder of the science of *kalām*, he wrote the following:

[Rather, [kalām] is a Qur’anic science, for it is detailed in God’s speech (i.e, the Qur’an), by discussing creed, prophethood, and revealed affairs, and that is the totality of [kalām], in addition to discussing matters which demonstrating the existence of the Creator assumes, such as the origination of the world that we see around us, in creating the heavens and the earth and humanity and so on; [the Qur’an] also indicates responses to the beliefs of opponents, such as trinitarians, dualists, and naturalists, rejecting their beliefs and responding to their specious arguments in denying [Qur’anic doctrines], such as God’s statement ‘Just as We began creation, We shall repeat it’ and His statement ‘Say: it will be resurrected by the One who created it the first time, and He is knowing of all things.’^[9]

The science of *kalām* fulfills several obligations and serves a number of purposes. For the individual, a minimal amount of its study in a text such as al-Sanūsī’s (d.895/1490) *Minor Creed*, will guide him or her to understanding what he or she must believe, in addition to giving reasons as to why those beliefs are true. For the Muslim community, *kalām* provides a language by which one engages with other non-Muslim scientific or religious communities, in addition to providing a language by which scholars of different schools can engage with each other on major or minor differences of opinion. *Kalām* also serves a scientific purpose: many of the fundamental axioms taken for granted in each of the particular Islamic sciences, such as the science of legal principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), law (*fiqh*), hadith, exegesis (*tafsīr*), semantics-rhetoric (*ma‘ānī, bayan*), are those established in the science of *kalām*.^[10] Not only does it provide foundations for the particular Islamic sciences, *kalām*, since it includes metaphysics, natural philosophy, and cosmology, also provides foundations for how Muslims should understand the empirical sciences, such as physics and astronomy.

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As such, scholars of *kalām* from all schools of thought wrote on all

of these topics in their works of *kalām*, and indeed, some of the most significant scientific breakthroughs were made by scholars of these disciplines. It was scholars of *kalām* who wrote the largest and most significant works of Qur’anic commentary,^[11] of hadith commentary^[12], of legal principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*)^[13], of logic^[14], of semantics-rhetoric (*ma‘ānī, bayan*)^[15], of grammar and morphology^[16], of philosophy of language (*‘ilm al-waḍ’*)^[17], of astronomy^[18], and so on.^[19] None of this can be found in the *fiṭra*. Indeed, all the technical language used by Ibn Taymiyya on epistemology, including his misappropriation of the notion of *fiṭra*, was entirely developed by the *kalām* tradition, yet they rarely get as much as a thank you. We should be grateful to them, and be grateful that Islamic civilization never took Ibn Taymiyya’s advice. Although many people today, due to their ignorance of the science, have uncritically been repeating his calls in the 21st century. Just at a time when Muslims are in need more than ever to deeply reengage with their scientific tradition, we have people telling us instead to put our heads in the sand.

On the Interpretation of Qur’an 52:35-6

A deeper look at one of Khan’s very few engagements with scripture is warranted. Take Qur’an 52:35-6: “Were they created by nothing, or were they themselves the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather, they have no certainty.” Khan tells us that while “proponents of *kalām*” (i.e., the overwhelming majority of the Muslims) took this verse to be “an allusion to a cosmological argument,” Ibn Taymiyya said that it should be read as *merely* a condemnation of anyone who denies God’s existence and unity. “Thus, the Qur’an is not engaged in propounding a syllogism to substantiate belief in God but rather it is invoking rational contemplation (*tafakkur*) to awaken spiritually quiescent souls to a reality they already recognize deep within.”^[20] What exactly is “rational contemplation” as opposed to the usual reasoning that people engage in? Is there any indication that this is the meaning from the verse? Khan does not say. He then takes the full Platonic turn by stating “The *role* of rational contemplation in the soul’s *recognition* of God is *one of re-discovering a reality deeply embedded in one’s fiṭrah*” (emphasis mine).^[21]

There are a few things to unpack here. The first is Khan’s denial that this verse is “propounding a syllogism.” Instead, it is “invoking rational contemplation.” On the one hand, I think Khan may be confused about what a syllogism is; on the other hand, he invokes a new term (i.e., “rational contemplation”) without telling us what it is and how it is to be distinguished from deductive reasoning. A syllogism is just a way to regiment our ideas; it is the standard form for deductive reasoning. Now, not every syllogism is a proof. One can express a proof in the form of a syllogism, one can likewise

express a dialectical argument in the form of a syllogism, and one can also express an analogy in the form of a syllogism. So, for example, we can express what Khan wrote in the form of a syllogism:

- (1) Qur'an 52:35-6 expresses a rhetorical question (minor premise, particular affirmation)
- (2) No rhetorical question expresses an argument (major premise, universal negation)
- (3) Qur'an 52:35-6 does not express an argument. (conclusion, particular negation)

By laying things out this way, it becomes easier to identify errors in reasoning, and whether we should accept the conclusion based on the premises that are presented. So, we can ask: is it possible to express an argument, at least indirectly, by means of a rhetorical question? The obvious answer is yes. Therefore, premise (2) is false. Therefore, the argument presented by Khan is unsound.

Furthermore, is there a contradiction between having an argument and already knowing the conclusion? And if the point of this verse was just to point to the fact that everyone already believed in God, why ask three different rhetorical questions, instead of just one? (there are in fact at least 11 rhetorical questions in this chapter of the Qur'an). Khan himself, unknowingly perhaps, presents Plato's answer to a skeptical argument in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* regarding the usefulness of arguments; the result is a theory of learning that states that arguments are there to help one *rediscover* or *recollect* what they already knew all along. Thus, argumentation is still beneficial, even if Khan does not want to admit that it can give us new knowledge. The fact that Plato and Khan call learning recognition, while Sunnī mutakallimūn call it knowledge acquisition, is immaterial; the important question is: does the argument give you something that you would not have otherwise "found" or "acquired"? If we form a disjunctive or categorical syllogism to express the different possibilities in this verse in order to 're-discover' what was already inside us, does this somehow undermine the legitimacy of the syllogistic form? This is after we concede, for argument's sake, that everyone already knows that God exists, which, as we shall see later, is questionable.

Secondly, by merely invoking Ibn Taymiyya's authority, Khan tries to foist an interpretation onto his readers without taking noting of one glaring detail. The verses are certainly a form of argumentation, where direct questions are being asked to those who wish to deny the truths of revelation and thereby not submit to God's command. But most importantly, the final part of the verse, "Indeed, they have no certainty," is precisely a denial that they have any certainty regarding God, God's prophets, or God's punishment and reward in the afterlife; for if they *did* have certainty, they would have accepted

Islam. Certainly, the verse is pointing out that it should be fairly clear, with some rudimentary reflection, that there is a God, that He is One, and He created everything, and therefore, should be venerated and obeyed to the exclusion of anything else. The verse, therefore, is telling them which questions to ask, and which things to examine, in order to come to that certainty. Amazingly, Khan thinks that this verse “*demonstrates* that this is a matter that is already a primordial conclusion *firmly established in one’s fiṭrah*,” despite the fact that God explicitly says that it is *not firmly established* (*bal lā yūqinūn!*); that is, it is precisely because they *doubt the truth* that they have not yet submitted, and the purpose of the argument is to put the objector in a position where they are forced to justify themselves or accept the truth. This is likewise what the overwhelming number of commentators had said on the subject.^[22] So much for “Atharī” approaches to theology.

Does Revelation Indicate that We Are Born with Knowledge?

So far, I have tried to present evidence that the Qur’an is committed to the efficacy of argument and reason, and that the Islamic tradition was continuing that imperative by establishing the science of kalām and its ancillaries such as logic. Now I would like to look at evidence in scripture that strongly undermines Ibn Taymiyya’s notion of *fiṭra* as containing knowledge and serving as some kind of ground for epistemic justification. Let us look at three cases:

(1) Qur’an 16:78 (And God has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers *not knowing anything* (*lā ta’lmaūna shay’ā*), and He gave you hearing, sight, and intellect, so that you may be thankful)

In technical speech, this is an indefinite noun in a negative clause, making it one of the strongest forms of negation in the Arabic language. Thus, every human being is born with no knowledge whatsoever. Then, by means of their senses, and their intellect, they can begin to accumulate knowledge, both its non-inferential form represented by the senses in this verse, and its inferential form, represented by intellect. By reflecting on the world and the revelation brought forth to the Prophet (S), they may come to the conclusion that there is a God who created them, and thereby, give Him thanks, as obliged by the Law. The key thing to notice here is that God categorically negates that we have *any knowledge at birth*. That is, the human soul is created and it has *no knowledge*, not least knowledge of God with the attributes and acts that is found in revelation. The knowledge acquisition process begins, presumably, with some form of consciousness and interactions with the world via sense, and so on, until one reaches adulthood. Once that occurs, their rational faculties are sufficient enough for them to be held morally responsible in the *sharī’a*, that is, they are at least

potentially *mukallaf*.

Now, in the following hadith, we will see that as the child reaches adulthood, he will normally take up whatever religion his parents have raised him on. The second piece of evidence, largely ignored by the *fiṭra* theorists who want to assert that everyone is born “Muslim,” is the following well authenticated hadith, narrated by Muslim (Kitāb al-Qadar, #4936):

(2) “Every human being brought forth by its mother is born upon the *fiṭra*, then his parents raise him to be Jewish, Christian, or Magian, and if [his parents] are Muslim, then (they raise him to be) Muslim.”

(3) Another narration (in the same chapter, #4934) states that “one is in the state of nature (*fiṭra*) until they express themselves (*ḥatta yu‘abbiru ‘anhu lisānuhu*).” In other words, they are in a theologically indeterminate or non-responsible state until such time that they are *able* to have reasoned beliefs and express them (even if they never bother to think about what they believe).

This narration comes with a series of others that pertain to human nature (*fiṭra*). Although it is too much detail for this reply, a perusal of the commentaries of the relevant verses and hadith indicates that ultimately, *fiṭra* refers to human nature, independently of one’s particular culturation, *including* a belief in God, let alone belief in a particular religion or philosophy such as Islam. It refers to humanity’s *tahayyu’*, that is, its preparedness and suitability for revealed religion. In other words, human nature *fits* with revealed religion exceptionally well. With respect to belief, it fits with human nature because it is *true*, and human beings naturally try to avoid false beliefs and contradictions. Things that we doubt and believe are false will continue to eat away at us until we resolve them. With respect to practices, a human being will realize that all prescriptions of the law conform to their nature and are ultimately good for them. The more one increases their understanding of both – their own nature and the revealed law – one’s conviction in the harmony between the two will increase.

Now, Ibn Taymiyya’s view on the *fiṭra* could have had some semblance of plausibility in a society which was permeated with the belief in God: where one’s familial relations, economic relations, political relations, and legal relations were all grounded in a revealed law and transmitted by a historically continuous community back to the Prophet (S). In such a world, the system of beliefs that were constitutive of normative reason took the belief in God as axiomatic, just as the belief in democratic politics or human rights is in the West today. However, the fact that most members of that society did not know how to epistemically justify that system of beliefs themselves did not mean that a number of specialists in that society were unable to justify them. Nor does it mean they are

being irrational in accepting those beliefs – being a member of that society requires one, in practice, to act on those beliefs *even if they do not believe in them*. It is on this basis that figures like Ibn Khaldūn did not believe that in-depth study of kalām *at his time* was required of most people: the heavy lifting had already been done by previous generations of kalām specialists. In such circumstances, it is certainly justifiable, at least normatively speaking, for the majority of the population not to engage in in-depth study of kalām, even if they are still required to answer a question like “Why are you a Muslim?” without saying something like “Because my parents/society are/is.”

The mutakallimūn, however, knew that epistemic justification was always required for the Muslim polity and for the Muslim individual, albeit at different degrees of sophistication. Thus, the deeper study of *kalām* (in fact, of all the sciences) was strictly a communal obligation; while the basic study of *kalām*, that is, the study of one’s creed with a sufficient degree of evidence such that one was not a *muqallid*, was obligatory upon all. If, on the other hand, *taqlid*, that is, belief without evidence, were sufficient, it would be equally sufficient for any other person to blindly imitate the beliefs of their society as well; but this is suspect, for the Qur’an says “What if their fathers understood nothing and were unguided?” (Qur’an 2:170). There is more that can be said on the subject, but I believe what has preceded- in addition to accumulated experience in the world today- is enough to show that any reliance on *fiṭra* is highly dubious, both rationally and scripturally.

Logical Argument and the Existence of God

Thus far, I have argued that (i) Revelation is committed to rational argument; (ii) Revelation indicates that man is born with no knowledge; (iii) Revelation does not indicate that *fiṭra* has the kind of epistemic capacity that Khan claims that it does. Now I would like to turn to Nazir Khan’s claim, taken from Ibn Taymiyya, that “syllogistic reasoning” cannot give us the existence of God, and that instead, all theoretical knowledge is acquired through analogical reasoning instead.

Somehow, Khan is happy to cite that “logical entailment” and “logic” are part of the *fiṭra*, while at the same time, citing Ibn Taymiyya, claims that no syllogistic argument can prove the existence of God because it only deals with ‘universals.’ This is of course an awkward contradiction: any human being, Ibn Taymiyya would surely admit (and he does), who sees an argument regimented in the first figure, will necessarily assent to the conclusion if they assent to the premises. To deny this, indeed, would be tantamount to *safsaṭa*. Let us take a look at what Khan writes:

Not only does Ibn Taymiyyah believe that syllogistic reasoning is not required to justify belief in God, but he argues that it does not

yield the epistemic fruits its proponents claim. This is true because the syllogism depends on a major premise that is, in fact, a universal abstraction that exists only as a category in the mind. On the other hand, the external world is comprised only of particulars. Consequently, a conclusion based on a universal premise can only rightfully apply to another universal category (e.g., the genus of ‘unmoved mover’) rather than to a particular entity. So philosophical proofs for God’s existence ultimately fall short of pointing particularly towards God Himself rather than a generic category.[\[23\]](#)

The gist of the argument, if it makes any sense at all, is that if your argument contains a universal premise, it can only produce a universal conclusion, rather than point to a particular entity. But is this true? Let us look at an example:

1. I began to exist (minor premise, particular affirmation)
2. Everything that begins to exist has a cause (major premise, universal affirmation)
3. I have a cause (conclusion: particular affirmation)

Does this argument really give me the existence of a “generic category” in my mind? That is, is the cause referred to in the conclusion just a ‘generic category’ that exists ‘only in the mind?’ Or does it give me the existence of an actual, particular cause that exists in objective reality? I think the answer is rather self-evident, inescapably, it gives us the existence of an actual, particular cause. In fact, if one looks at a list of the productive moods of the 4 figures, there are 17 productive moods that yield a particular conclusion (e.g. Some S is P or Some S is not P). This is something that should be known to the elementary student of Islamic logic.

If Khan, however, means that the conclusion is *indefinite*, meaning, it does not identify *who* or *what* my specific cause is, then he is right; but if this is his critique, then it is still hopelessly off the mark. First, the purpose of a deductive argument is not to identify who or what the reality of something is; that is the task of the logic of definitions. But no true definition of God is possible, for our definitions are ultimately based on the categories reducible to things that exist in this world. Meanwhile, syllogistic reasoning depends on a middle term which is common to the major and minor premises, and because it relies on what is common, its conclusion will always affirm a common predicate to a subject; but as we saw above, that subject may be particular, and it may be universal. In both cases, the judgment contained in the conclusion will still hold for all the particular beings, 1 or many: in the case of a particular conclusion, this should be obvious, and in the case of a universal conclusion, then the judgment will hold for all existent particulars by virtue of the universal premise. For example, if your conclusion is something like “Every S is P,” then by virtue of this, you know that each individual S in the world has the predicate P. Thus, there is

nothing particularly profound about Ibn Taymiyya's critique, which Khan has haphazardly cited here.^[24]

Secondly, the critique is off the mark because there is no one in the Islamic tradition, not least in the tradition of logic, who claims that *all knowledge is limited to the syllogistic form*. Rather, the logicians, the mutakallimūn, and the falāsifa, use deductive arguments, inductive arguments, and analogical arguments. Furthermore, they are explicit that the premises deployed in deductive proofs must be reducible to the following categories of non-inferential knowledge: (i) first principles (e.g., It is impossible for something to exist and not-exist); (ii) sense perception ('the Sacred Dome is Green'); (iii) introspection ('I am hungry'); (iv) intuitive premises (e.g., '4 is an even number'); (v) intuitional premises (e.g., upon seeing a lunar eclipse you immediately grasp that 'the moon derives its light from the sun'); (vi) experiential premises (e.g., 'salty foods make one thirsty'); (vii) widely transmitted reports (e.g., 'the Sacred Dome is green' for those who have not seen it directly). These premises are then combined with one another to yield new knowledge by means of deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, and analogical reasoning, in accordance with what is appropriate to the subject matter at hand.



Sadr al-Shari'a al-Bukhari's (d.746/1346) summa on Logic, Kalam, and Astronomy (Nuruosmaniye Library, fol.302)

In metaphysics and theology, the line of reasoning proceeds something like the following: we first need to know whether there is a cause for the world at all, before we continue our investigation of trying to identify who or what that cause is. In order to do that, we must examine the components of the world, and we may use deductive, inductive, or analogical arguments to argue that the world and all its components are temporally originated and contingent. From this, we infer that the world must have a cause, for temporally originated/contingent beings cannot come to exist

without a cause. It is patently obvious that this gives us the existence of a cause in objective reality, and not merely in our minds. Now, even if the argument does not tell us *what* the cause is, or *who* precisely it is, we can still show that there is *exactly one cause*, i.e., the Creator, and therefore, all the judgments we affirm of that cause only pertain to Him. From the fact that the world is temporally originated we infer that God is eternal; from the fact that the world is contingent we know that God is a necessary being. From the fact that the world exists, is specified in certain ways instead of others, is beautiful and precisely designed, we infer that the Creator must have power, will, knowledge, and life. Thus, there is nothing in these types of inferences that prevents us from demonstrating the existence of God and some of His attributes; the truth of Prophethood; and ultimately, the veracity of Islam's truth claims. If Khan wants to show us that logic is a useless discipline, he needs to try a bit harder.

Khan, having clearly never studied the subject (it is never a good idea to criticize something you have never studied), fails to understand another very basic purpose of logic: to provide a normative system that governs our inferences, in order to eliminate errors in logical inference. It provides us a language and a format to regiment our inferences in a way to provide clarity. The syllogism is just that: a way to express and regiment human reasoning. It is categorically *not exhaustive* of all the ways to arrive at inferential knowledge, nor is this claimed by any logician. None of them reject non-inferential forms of knowledge; none of them reject inductive reasoning; none of them reject analogical reasoning. In fact, it was Rāzī, one of the greatest logicians and thinkers in all of Islamic history, who explicitly held that all human conceptions are acquired *non-inferentially* (that is, *not by means of definitions per se*), and in fact, in a less widely known version of his view, he held that *all* knowledge, conceptual and propositional, was acquired *non-inferentially*.

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The process of human reasoning, on this view, occurs by a series of non-inferential steps, one after another, and one of the main tasks of syllogistic logic is to ensure that those steps are justified, and aiding human beings to have fruitful discussions with one another. Likewise, once a certain degree of logic is mastered, and we engage in the particular empirical or deductive sciences, our conclusions will be much more reliable.

I cannot stress enough the importance of logic, whose applications

could not have been known to Muslim logicians of the middle ages. One stark example, which a neuroradiologist should have some appreciation for, is the invention of the computer. The very same logical formulas, first discovered by the likes of Aristotle, Avicenna, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, or Afḍal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī, are the basis upon which the hardware and software of your digital devices operate. For example, what was known as the logic of conditionals (*lawāzim al-sharṭiyyāt*), is now the basis of what are known in computer engineering as logic gates (e.g., implementing logical operators such as ‘and’ ‘or’ ‘not’ and so on). It is quite a sad state of affairs when someone whose entire livelihood depends on the legitimacy of this discipline wants to ask us to throw it out.

Now, from the preceding, we know how wrong Khan is when he says:

What is actually happening when people engage in syllogistic reasoning (*qiyās al-shumūl*) is that the real source of their epistemic growth in knowledge is analogical reasoning (*qiyās al-tamthīl*) which allows them to transfer their knowledge about known particulars to the new case in question.[\[25\]](#)

Here I would like to add something very important that Khan and his cognitive psychologist friends appear to have overlooked. It may be true that analogical reasoning is important in the empirical sciences, be they social sciences (such as sociology and economics) or physical sciences (such as physics and chemistry), but analogical reasoning is not enough to explain many other forms of human knowledge. Each of these empirical sciences must stand on a set of hardcore of first principles that guide research and the interpretation of their findings. Furthermore, the conceptual apparatus present in these sciences is likewise not fully explicable in terms of analogical reasoning. In fact, sense perception itself does not give us pure knowledge: we are always deploying concepts to interpret sense perception itself.

There are still less complicated reasons to reject this simplistic view of knowledge. Mathematics, for example, is not an empirical science at all, but it is certainly something we call “knowledge.” It proceeds almost entirely according to deductive reasoning. Logic is largely the same. Inductive and deductive logic are likewise used in sciences like grammar, morphology, and semantics-rhetoric. Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* likewise operate according to deductive, inductive, and analogical reasoning. I mean, the very justification of *qiyas* as an instrument for deriving legal rulings is itself justified by means of *deductive logic*.

“Metaphysics, the most fundamental of all sciences, is likewise a deductive discipline that does not operate according to analogical reasoning, even if it makes use of it, just as it may make use of inductive forms of reasoning. The fact that it has become popular

today to exclude these disciplines from their definition of “science” does not change this fact.”

Metaphysics, the most fundamental of all sciences, is likewise a deductive discipline that does not operate according to analogical reasoning, even if it makes use of it, just as it may make use of inductive forms of reasoning. The fact that it has become popular today to exclude these disciplines from their definition of “science” does not change this fact. Now, I hope one can now appreciate why it is someone like Ibn Taymiyya would want to assert that all of our theoretical knowledge is analogical: it is one of the primary modes of reasoning in the empirical sciences. That is because the objects which the empirical sciences study are all similar to each other, and therefore, direct analogies are warranted between them. Ibn Taymiyya, likewise, believed God shared many real properties with creation, and it is that assumption which allows for his unbridled use of analogical reasoning.^[26] Recall that our arguments for God’s existence give us the existence of a God that does not undergo changes, does not have contingent properties, is not in a spatial location, and so on. Once you reject deductive reasoning and reject the arguments for the existence of God, one can make an appeal to *fiṭra* and analogical reasoning to justify a theology that is drastically different to all the other schools of Islam, not least the mainstream Sunnī theology shared by the vast majority of Muslims.

Concluding Remarks on Ghazālī, Skepticism, and Kalām

As is typical with anyone who has consumed the Taymiyyan drink, Khan did not miss the opportunity to undermine the greatest inheritance that Muslims have in this regard: the tradition of kalām, meticulously worked on and contributed to by thousands of scholars since the very beginning of Islām. Here it is appropriate to end on Khan’s mischaracterization of Ghazālī:

In his spiritual autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, al-Ghazali describes how he overcame his own struggle with Pyrrhonian doubt *through spiritual experience and enlightenment rather than philosophical argumentation*.^[27] (emphasis mine)

This is simply not true. Here is what Ghazali says regarding how the issue was resolved and why he even bothered to deal with it:

The purpose of these stories is (an encouragement) for one to exert all their efforts in inquiry until they arrive at that which cannot be demonstrated, for first principles (*awwaliyyāt*) are not demonstrated, for they are always present, and if one seeks what is present, it becomes obscured; and *whoever seeks out what cannot be proven cannot be accused of not exhausting all avenues of seeking what can be proven*.^[28]

From this final paragraph in Ghazālī’s discussion of skepticism in

the *Munqidh*, we realize that he has three aims. First, that the problem of skepticism only arises when one assumes that first principles can be proven by demonstration, i.e., in the same way that inferential propositions can be proven. But the assumption, although it is not immediately obvious, turns out to be false. Once one abandons this unjustified position, namely, that every belief we have must be *proven through demonstrative argument*, the problem of radical skepticism disappears. Notice: there is nothing mystical about this response to skepticism. It is a standard foundationalist account, and it involves accepting, as all mutakallimūn did, the various categories of non-inferential (*ḍarūrī*) knowledge as being justified, or justifiable, through non-inferential means: (1) rational first principles (*badahiyyāt*) (2) sense perception (*maḥsūsāt*), (3) introspection (*wijdāniyyat*) (4) natural or evident premises (*fiṭriyyāt*) (5) intuitional inferences (*ḥadsiyyāt*), (6) experience (*mujarrabāt*), (7) widely transmitted reports (*mutawātirāt*).

Secondly, Ghazālī's success or failure in the *Munqidh* is dependent on whether he can convince his readers that he really has tried every possible option available to humanity. He has even come to examine the most basic beliefs taken for granted by everyone without the slightest hint of doubt. This is closely related to his third aim, to encourage qualified students (to whom his work is dedicated) to not leave any stone unturned in their quest for knowledge. This approach to rational inquiry is itself an indication of one's sincerity in the path to God.

Furthermore, against Khan's assertion, Ghazali does not in fact acquire certainty in God, Prophethood, and the Last Day through 'spiritual experience and enlightenment,' unless one includes scientific practice in their definition of enlightenment. Ghazālī's second crisis was not about matters of skepticism or belief in God or Prophethood; it was about whether he was living a sincere life dedicated to God, or if he was merely seeking fame and status, courted by viziers and surrounded by students. Take note of how he describes himself before going on his spiritual sojourn:

Through engagement and practice of the rational and Islamic sciences (*al-'ulūm al-'aqliyya wa l-shar'iyya*), I acquired *certain belief in God the Exalted, in Prophethood, and in the Last Day*. These three foundations of belief had been established in my soul, not by any one piece of evidence, but for many causes and circumstances and experiences that cannot be enumerated.[\[29\]](#)

Again, Ghazali states that his years of study of the Islamic sciences, namely, *kalām*, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *hadith*, *tafsīr*, *taṣawwuf*, and so forth, and the rational sciences, such as logic, argumentation theory, and philosophy, led to an unshakable belief in God, Prophethood, and the Last Day. The fact that he said it did not happen due to one single argument does not undermine the fact that studying these sciences led him to this state of certainty.

Nowhere here does he claim that he achieved this through mystical experience, and it would be very problematic if he did in fact say that.

Moreover, towards the end of his life, long after Ghazali completed his *Iḥyā*, went on his spiritual sojourn, and returned to teaching, he wrote a famous work on the science of legal principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). In the introduction, he explains the role of the science of kalām and its relationship to the other sciences. Consider how Ghazali explicates what it is the *mutakallim* does, and how that relates to the other Islamic sciences:

Know that the sciences divide into rational...and religious...and each of the rational and religious sciences divide into universal and particular. So, the universal science for the religious sciences is kalām, while all the other sciences, like *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *hadith*, *tafsir*, are particular sciences.^[30]

Ghazali then goes on to discuss what each scholar examines, until he arrives at the *mutakallim*, who:

Investigates the most general of things, which is the existent (*al-mawjud*). And he divides it into the eternal and the temporal; and the temporal into atom and accident...Then he examines the eternal, and demonstrates that it does not multiply nor divide as temporal entities do, rather he must be one, and distinct from all temporal entities with attributes that are necessary for him, impossible for him, and judgments that are possible for him, neither necessary nor impossible...then he shows that creation (*fi'l*) is possible for him, and that the World is his contingent act, and because it is contingent it requires a cause; and sending prophets is from among His contingent acts, and He has power over it, and power to demonstrate their truthfulness with miracles, and this is contingent and occurrent. And at this point the discourse of the *mutakallim* stops, and the [independent] reflection of intellects ends. Rather the intellect shows the truthfulness of the Prophet, then resigns itself, and acknowledges that it accepts the truth from the Prophet regarding what he says of God and the Last Day, that which reason alone cannot reach, nor can it judge to be impossible.^[31]

Ghazali then goes on to say that therefore “kalām has the highest rank, and from it one descends to the particulars.”^[32] Now, given his description of kalām, I do not think it is possible for anyone to claim that Ghazali did not believe in the efficacy of reason or the usefulness of this science. Second, we see that Ghazali recognizes kalām as the universal science of Islam, from which all other Islamic sciences take their fundamental axioms. Furthermore, we see how important the science is in setting the foundations for the empirical sciences as well, for it requires the study of cosmology and physics, i.e., the study of the world and everything in it, insofar

as it indicates the truths of revelation. This invariably requires an analysis of physical reality that can then be redeployed as foundations for the interpretation and grounding of the empirical sciences, and so on.

To conclude: the science of kalām is important. Islam is committed to knowledge and truth; it is committed to the possibility that the veracity of its claims to truth can be demonstrated; the most important belief, upon which the entire edifice of religion stands, is the belief in God. Human nature, that is, the *fiṭra*, includes the capacity to reason and the drive to ask questions and investigate the world, our ultimate origins, and our ultimate purposes.

Experience and scripture indicate that Ibn Taymiyya's notion of *fiṭra* is insufficient for these foundations. Muslims stand to lose a great deal by adopting this approach. As for those equipped with the resources to conduct research in contributing to that tradition, it has long become imperative.

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***Top Image:** Sadr al-Shari'a debating hylomorphism and atomism in the physics section of his kalam work, *Ta'dil al 'Ulum* (Konya Yusuf Karatay 7028, fol.134).

[1] Nazir Khan, "Atheism and Radical Skepticism: Ibn Taymiyyah's Epistemic Critique," p.6 in the PDF version of the article available online: <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/nazir-khan/atheism-and-radical-skepticism-ibn-taymiyyahs-epistemic-critique/>

[2] Nazir Khan, "Atheism and Radical Skepticism: Ibn Taymiyyah's Epistemic Critique," pp.48.

[3] Ibid, 34-5.

[4] Ibid, 34.

[5] Ibid, 34.

[6] Ibid, 34.

[7] Ibid, 34.

[8] See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981) vol.20, 140-141.

[9] Al-Yūsī, *al-Qānūn*, 182-183.

[10] For example, sciences like *fiqh* assume certain things, such as: the existence of God, the truth of prophethood, the integral transmission of the sources, the validity of rational inferences and analogy, the origin and signification of language, and so on, but they do not establish the truths of any of these axioms. *Uṣūl al-fiqh*,

likewise, assumes a number of principles taken from kalām which it does not establish by itself, such as the existence of God and His attributes and the existence and authority of prophethood, and certain basic elements of epistemology and rational inquiry, upon which it builds its own subsets of general forms of arguments at play in particular sciences such as *fiqh*. Hadith science, for example, similarly operates on certain assumptions that it does not investigate by itself. Towards the end of this essay, this will be explained in more detail by taking a look at an excerpt in Ghazālī's *Mustaṣfā fī uṣūl al-fiqh*.

[11] This includes Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d.310/923), as any cursory examination of the introduction to his *Tarīkh* (vol.1/28) will indicate, along with many parts of his *Tafsīr* (e.g. the exegesis of 6:103), in fact, it is likely that he was killed by some Hanbalīs due to his rejection of their anthropomorphic beliefs and their incapacity to deal with it; the *Tafsīr* of Māturīdī (d.333/944); al-Qāḍī Ibn al-ʿArabī (d.543/1148), al-Qurṭubī (d.671/1273), al-Zamakhsharī (d.538/1144) (a Muʿtazilite, to be sure, but his exegesis was nevertheless excellent, and so earned a great deal of attention from Sunni scholars), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, whose *tafsīr* is unparalleled; *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* (d.716/1316); they were also pioneers of works on *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, most notably the work of the Ashʿarī theologian Qāḍī Abu Bakr al-Bāqillānī, alongside his defence of the integral transmission of the Qurʾān in his *Intiṣār*; Baqillānī's student, Abu ʿAmr al-Dānī (d.444/1053) is one of the most important scholars of Qurʾanic recitation.

[12] Figures include Ibn Baṭṭāl (d.449/1057), one of the first commentators on Bukhārī; Abu'l Walīd al-Bājī (d.474/1081) (a commentary on the Muwaṭṭa); al-Maziri (d.536/1141), on Saḥīḥ Muslim; al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d.544/1149) on Muslim; al-Qāḍī Abu Bakr Ibn Arabī (d.543/1148) on the Muwaṭṭa and Tirmidhī; Ibn al-Tīn (d.611/1214), commentary on Bukhārī; al-Nawawī on Saḥīḥ Muslim (d.676/1277); Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d.852/1449), whose commentary on Bukhārī includes several refutations of Ibn Taymiyya, including his belief in the eternity of the world; al-Sanūsī (d.895/1490) (on Saḥīḥ Muslim). All these authors either wrote on kalami topics themselves, either in their commentaries or independently.

[13] The mutakallimūn arguably invented this discipline, and it is impossible to study it today without reading their works. Important contributors include: Baqillānī, Juwaynī, Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Sayf al-Dīn al-Amidī, Ibn al-Ḥājjib, al-Qarāfī, Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī al-Bayḍāwī, al-Ijī, Sadr al-Sharīʿa al-Bukhārī, al-Taftāzānī, al-Jurjānī, and many others. On the other hand, one can become a master of this science without ever reading anything by Ibn Taymiyya.

[14] Figures include: al-Ghazālī, al-Rāzī, al-Khūnajī (d.646/1248),

al-Urmawī (d.682/1283), al-Abharī (d.686/1264), al-Kātibī (d.675/1277), Qutb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.766/1365), Ibn ‘Arafa (d.803/1401), al-Sanūsī (d.895/1490), al-Dawānī (d.908/1502), al-Bihārī (d.1117/1707), and Gelenbevi (d.1205/1791).

[15] Important figures include al-Baqillānī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, and virtually everyone who has written on the subject after them, such as al-Fakhr al-Razi, al-Sakkākī, al-Taftāzānī, al-Jurjānī, ‘Iṣām al-Dīn al-Isfarāyīnī, etc.

[16] Those keenly aware of the technical terminology and precision of grammar and its historical emergence in Basra and Kufa during the second century will see that there is a strong correspondence between grammatical analysis and kalāmī analysis, and this perhaps explains why early figures like al-Khalil had likewise engaged in debates with the Mu‘tazila, who also made profound contributions to the sciences of the Arabic language.

[17] This is a science which studies the types of relationships that hold between words, their intension, and their extension. Its beginnings may be found in early works on language and morphology, such as the Mu‘tazilite Ibn Jinnī, but it takes its independent form as a science by the mutkallim ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ijī.

[18] In fact, many late era kalām works included chapters on astronomy, some of which were meant to interpret astronomy using kalāmī principles in order to demonstrate that it does not undermine principles of belief, while many mutakallimūn were active contributors to the science, such as Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a al-Bukhārī (d.746/1346), al-Sayyīd al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d.816/1413), and ‘Alā al-Dīn al-Qūshjī (d.879/1474). Qūshjī, an Ash‘arī mutakallim, is famous for his ‘freeing’ of astronomy from Aristotelian metaphysics, allowing him to suggest for the first time, for example, that the earth is rotating about its own axis, all this in his famous kalām commentary, *al-Sharḥ al-Jadīd ‘alā al-Tajrīd*.

Evidence suggests that the great astronomer and physicist Ibn al-Haytham also wrote works in kalām, although they are not extant. It is interesting that his rejection of extramissionist theories of vision were rejected by Ash‘arī theologians in their debates on the Beatific Vision: some early Mu‘tazilite writers argued that the Beatific Vision was impossible based on extramissionist theories (meaning that vision occurs by a light ray being emitted from the eye to capture an object, but since God was not a spatial object, He could not be seen). Ash‘arīs, in their disputes with them from the earliest period, presented critiques of extramissionist theories of vision which were worthy of consideration irrespective of their theological motivations.

[19] What we find astonishingly little of, not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of contributions to the Islamic sciences, are the contributions by corporealists.

[20] Khan, 28.

[21] Ibid.

[22] For example: (1) Muhammad Ibn ‘Arafa, *Tafsir Ibn Arafa*, ed. Jalal al-Asyutī, (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ilmiyah, 2008) vol.4/86-88; (2) Qādī al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa asrār al-ta`wīl, al-ma`rūf bi-tafsīr al-Bayḍawī*, ed. Muhammad Abd al-Raḥman al-Mar‘ashli, (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turāth al-‘arabi, n.d.) vol.5/155; (3) Ebussuud Efendi, *Tafsīr Ebus-su`ūd*, ed. Abd al-Qadir Ahmad ‘Aṭā, (Riyāḍ: Maktabat al-Riyāḍ al-Hadītha, n.d.) vol.5/213-4; (4) Makkī b. Abī Ṭālib, *al-Hidāya ila bulūgh al-nihāya*, p.7131; (5) Ibn ‘Aṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrir al-wajīz fi tafsīr al-kitāb al-‘azīz*, (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002) p.1775; (6) al-Wāhidi, *al-Wasīṭ fi tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-majīd*, (ed. ‘Adil Abd al-Mawjud et al), (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya) vol.4/189; (7) Qurṭubī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, ed. Abd-Allah al-Turki et al, (Beirut: al-Resalah Publishers, 2006) vol.19: 535-6; (8) Abu Hayyan, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, ed. Sidqi Jamil, (Beirut: Dar al-Fekr, 2010) vol.9/575; (9) al-Baghawi, *Ma`ālim al-tanzīl*, ed. Muhammad al-Nimr et al, (Riyāḍ: Dar Tayba, 1988) vol.7/392; (10) Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘azīm*, ed. Sami al-Salamah, (Riyad: Dar Tayba, 1997) vol.7/437; (11) Abul-Barakāt Abd-Allah b. Ahmad al-Nasafi, *Madārik al-tanzīl wa ḥaqāiq al-ta`wīl*, ed. Sayyid Zakariyya (Maktabat Mustafa al-Baz, n.d.) vol.4, 1160; (12) al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshāf ‘an ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-aqāwīl*, ed. ‘Ādil ‘Abd al-Mawjūd et al, (Riyad: Maktabat al-Abaykan, 1998) vol.5/630.

[23] Khan, 30.

[24] In fact, arguing by analogy gives us the same kinds of conclusions. For example, if one says ‘wine is haram because it is an intoxicant’ and then analogizes to beer and says ‘beer is like wine, because it is an intoxicant’ they may conclude that ‘beer is haram because it is an intoxicant.’ Notice that our conclusion is likewise a universal proposition that we have come to by means of analogy.

[25] Khan, 30.

[26] In other words, if you assume that everything in existence is somehow spatial and physical, that it is fundamentally temporal and undergoes change, then one can validate analogy between all things in existence, including God. The problem is that generalization through analogy is often unjustified unless it is restricted with certain conditions.

[27] Khan, 4.

[28] Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1988) 30.

[29] Ibid, 59.

[30] Ghazali, *Mustasfa*, vol.1, 12.

[\[31\]](#) Ghazali, *Mustasfa*, vol.1, 13-14.

[\[32\]](#) Ibid, 16.